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AUTHOR Anderson, Robert H.
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ABSTRACT

This paper recounts the history of nongraded elementary schools. After the American Civil War, there arose an uncoordinated effort to question graded practices. By the end of the 19th century, schools which sought to be more sensitive to differences in children's learning styles were established. Notable among these schools was Dewey's Laboratory School (1893-1903). In the 20th century, Stoddard's Dual Progress Plan proposed that students spend half the school day in a homeroom and half the day studying elective subjects under specialist teachers. In Germany around 1923, Petersen established a school that featured heterogeneous age groupings. Petersen's ideas influenced the establishment of nongraded schools in Wisconsin. Other European influences on the American nongraded school movement included Montessori's schools and the British Infant and Primary School system. Since the mid-1940s, public education in America has been in disequilibrium. The implementation of nongraded programs has been facilitated by the practices of multi-age grouping and team teaching, and hindered by a number of factors, the most important of which is the lack of true professional status for the teaching profession. Appended materials include a glossary, a 15-item reference list, and an excerpt from an 1867 book on graded schools. (BC)

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THE NONGRADED ELEMENTARY SCHOOL:

LESSONS FROM HISTORY

Paper for presentation in Division A Symposium 4.35.

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THE NONGRADED ELEMENTARY SCHOOL: LESSONS FROM HISTORY

Robert H. Anderson

Having recently re-read Harold Benjamin's brilliant 1939 satire, THE SABER-TOOTH CURRICULUM, and having enjoyed other accounts of human learning in prehistoric times - some fictional, as in Jean Auel's best-selling novels, and some more scholarly, as in Gary Bernhard's fascinating PRIMATES IN THE CLASSROOM (1988) - I begin this paper with an awareness of primary-source deficiency. What most of us know about the evolution of formal education prior to the early Nineteenth Century, especially as it might help us to understand what the Prussian graded schools sought to replace, is very insubstantial.

It seems safe, however, to assume that prior to the early 1800s the clientele for schools were mostly from the privileged classes, were generally heading for ecclesiastical or political careers, and were served by tutors or teachers in a relatively private and individualized setting. It will be remembered that in what was soon to become The United States, the notion of universal, publicly-supported education was at most a seedling and the perceived need for simple skills training and religious literacy, as opposed to a truly liberal and broadening education, was still predominant in discussions about schooling.

Therefore the Nineteenth Century events that led to the presumably-more-efficient graded system and that accompanied the expansion of nonprivate schooling represented a rather major step forward. Had there been at mid-century an AERA, or some primitive version thereof, it seems likely that the General Session speakers would have been very supportive of graded organization, although some of the break-out session presenters might have been critical of the excessively religious overtones in policies and programs as well as the inflexibility and severity of emerging practices. In the then-prevailing view of educators, and, we must presume, the lay leaders to whom they were accountable, the schools no less than the churches had the grave responsibility of converting inherently wicked and slothful children into virtuous, honorable, obedient, mannerly, moral and unselfish adults (see Appendix).

The literature of the mid-century graded school (e.g., Wells 1867) emphasized uniformity grade by grade, often referred directly to Satan as a force to be countered through rigorous measures, and prescribed in detail both the thoughts and the procedures through which such adults could be shaped. Accepted views of the learning process and of human motivation were very primitive, as indeed they continue to be in pockets of fundamentalism across the world; and although the intentions of educators in the heyday of gradedness were doubtless honorable their methods and policies were not only inefficacious but in several respects child-abusive.

Not long after the Civil War there began to be an energetic but (alas) uncoordinated effort to question graded practices and to introduce alternative mechanisms. Some represented modifications of the rigid graded timetable, one example being a plan in St. Louis for more frequent reclassification and

promotion. Some attacked the overdependence on highly-structured instructional materials (textbooks). Most reformers called for greater sensitivity to the legitimate differences among children in their learning styles and their needs, and most also tried to develop more effective ways of grouping, classifying, and rewarding children. Among the more familiar efforts of these sorts were the Pueblo (Colorado) Plan of 1888; the Batavia (New York) Plan involving special assistance to slow learners, the work-unit plan at San Franciso Normal School, the work-study-play Platoon Plan developed by Wirt in 1900 in Gary Indiana, and of course John Dewey's Laboratory School at the University of Chicago 1893-1903.

The Dewey School

Dewey's school prompted thinking and events that forever weakened the literally graded school, although a century later the arrangement stubbornly persists. Dewey's notions (see Mayhew and Edwards 1936) of an interest-centered curriculum, of pupil-initiated activities, of the co-involvement of teachers in program planning, of avoiding comparisons of the work of children, of teacher specialization, of what in later decades would be called team teaching (Dewey called it "cooperative social organization"), and of intellectual bonding and interchange triggered or reinforced numerous efforts to develop more flexible curricular and school-organization patterns.

That Dewey's program questioned reliance on the capability of any one teacher to understand and present the entire curriculum of a given grade stimulated new discourse about the self-contained-classroom aspect of gradedness. Among the most entrenched features of the graded elementary school, as embodied (even idealized) in John Philbrick's Quincy Grammar School (opened in Boston in 1848 under Horace Mann's influence), was the provision, unique at the time, of a separate room for each teacher. Given the prevailing patterns of individual teacher supervision and of disciplinary control of pupils, there was little if any opportunity, or temptation, for teachers in graded schools to join forces or to permit the mingling of pupils from different classrooms. Self containment for them became a way of life.

Such variations as later emerged, for example the addition of personnel to work with slower or brighter pupils and the hiring of specialists in such "non-basic" areas as music, art, and physical education, generally respected the prime role of the self-contained classroom teacher. Even such important experiments in the 1920s as Carleton Washburne's Winnetka Plan (with homeroom teachers) and Helen Parkhurst's Dalton Plan (with specialized teachers and the mingling of age groups on a nongraded basis), although breaking significantly from total self-containment, did not successfully challenge the prevailing isolated-teacher format.

The Dual Progress Plan

An interesting case in point was George Stoddard's Dual Progress Plan (1961). Stoddard's proposal grew out of a conviction that the graded system was at least partly obsolete. He called for semidepartmentalization within which pupils, particularly in grades 4, 5, and 6, would spend about half the day in one room with a "home teacher" who was a specialist in reading and social studies (Stoddard called these the "cultural imperatives"), and who also performed certain

counseling and orientation functions. Physical education, taught by a p.e. specialist, also was offered during this half of the day. In the other half of the day, what Stoddard called the "cultural electives", all areas requiring equally expert instruction, were taught within achievement/ability groupings by specialists in mathematics, science, art and music.

Despite a very strong research and theoretical base, the Dual Progress Plan did not survive a torrent of abuse and criticism by advocates of the literally self-contained classroom. For most specialists in elementary education at that time, departmentalization of any sort was anathema, and the aroused forces of established habit and tradition were simply too strong for ideas such as Stoddard's to counteract. It is particularly ironic that the angry critics included such staunch opponents of graded schools as Alice V. Keliher, a critic of homogeneous grouping (see Keliher 1936) and arguably one of the prime advocates of young children in her generation. These same critics, by the way, had been particularly vocal in opposition to team teaching when it was introduced in the late l950s.

European Influences

While the Progressive Education movement, which followed Dewey's work, was running its course in The United States, similar stirrings were evident in Europe. Notable, for the purposes of this paper, was the experimental school developed in Germany 1923ff by Peter Petersen, a professor in the University of Jena whose ideas were apparently very compatible with, and possibly influenced by, Dewey. Petersen (b. 1884; d. 1952) started his school ca. 1923 for the children of workers in the Zeiss (optics) factory, deriving its concepts from what was termed New Education (Both 1991). Featuring age-heterogeneous groups for children ages 6-9, Petersen's plan sought to provide not an exclusive alternative school, but rather a school for all children.

An oddity is that in 1923 Petersen became successor, as director of the University Laboratory School of Jena, to world-famous Wilhelm Rein, a Herbartian who preached the blessings of gradedness and whose graded-achievement, authoritarian school was a model of well-prepared lessons in a very structured environment. Partly because of changes in the German political climate and partly because the lab school faculty and parents were eager to abandon the old-fashioned system, Petersen as a prominent representative of the German Progressive School Movement was a welcome replacement for Rein; and Petersen found a receptive environment in which to change the character of the school and make it into a modern "Fellowship School."

A Froebelian (as well as a Pestalozzian) disciple, Petersen in 1934 added an "optimal Kindergarten" and the lab school by then had become a real Children's Community for 5-15-year old pupils in:

> a continuous learning process based on the fundamentals of the New Education: humanization by recognition of the uniqueness of the child, search for the child's well-balanced development by meeting his physical, emotional, social, intellectual, moral and esthetic needs, fostering fellowship and the feeling of belonging and togetherness, helpfulness and respect for others, search for

> freedom and in dependence and love for learning through personal inquiry. (Freudenthal-Lutter, in Both 1990, p. 4)

Detailed descriptions of Petersen's ideas and his school are available in English largely thanks to Susan Freudenthal-Lutter, who was the prime force in development of the Dutch Jenaplan Movement, in which some 220 schools were involved as of 1990. In the 1960s, Freudenthal-Lutter visited the U.S.A. to establish links with Goodlad, Anderson, and others involved in the American nongraded school movement; and later she coordinated several exchange visits one result of which was to affirm the universality (e.g., Britain, Germany, Holland, and the U.S.A.) and the usefulness of such concepts and practices as multi-age (family) groupings, life-skills development, flexibility for variability, play as a basic activity, emphasis on critical thinking, and various ways of humanizing the school.

In 1969 Freudenthal-Lutter also launched a journal, PEDOMORFOSE, which ran 50 issues until 1982; a successor journal, MENSEN-KINDEREN, was launched in 1985 by the Dutch Jenaplan Association. Pre- and in-service courses developed by the association were acknowledged by the Dutch government in 1989 as official courses for Jenaplanschools.

American Extensions of Jenaplan

In 1921 Petersen, who at the time was Head of a progressive High School in Hamburg, made a presentation about the school at an international conference of the New Education Fellowship in Switzerland, attended by progressive educators including two German-speaking American educators. These women later suggested the name Jenaplan-school and, following subsequent summer-session studies with Petersen in Jena, became advocates of his approach in their native Wisconsin.

On a personal note, I (Anderson) interviewed these two women in the 1960s, although unfortunately the interview notes were subsequently lost. One, then 87 years old and living in retirement in Baraboo, Wisconsin, spoke of persuading her superintendent (Lowell Goodrich, who later became Superintendent in Milwaukee and launched Milwaukee's Ungraded Primary Program in 1942) to introduce Petersen's ideas in her school. The other, Dr. Mae O'Brien, had become a professor at SUNY-Buffalo, and some of her published reports are available (see Both, 1991). The two women apparently served as an important link between European educational thinking and American practice, in a sense repeating Horace Mann's role but this time reversing the conceptual flow.

Though surely there were other forces at work in America, the introduction of "ungraded" practices in Wisconsin accompanied by the growing literatures of promotion-versus-retention, pupil grouping practices, individualized instruction, and the infinite complexities of human learning helped create a climate within which various experiments with vertical and horizontal organizational alternatives became possible. Among the most productive of these were the introduction of differentiated staffing (teacher aides), multi-graded/ multi-age pupil grouping, cooperative teaching, and attendant efforts to make school buildings more flexible.

Other, Related Movements

Among the European antecedents or corollaries of nongraded schools in the U.S.A. can be included not only Petersen's Jenaplanschools featuring multi-aged pupil groupings but also Maria Montessori's system emphasizing manipulative materials, Celestine Freinet's system in France, and the British Infant and Primary schools as influenced not only by Dewey but by the ideas of Nathan and Susan Isaacs. Also should be noted the influence of the Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget, who is credited with the insight that children go invariably through certain growth stages, learning over varying periods of time.

Oddly, American interest in the British approach, featuring family grouping among other things, did not catch fire until the late l960s; and although "Open Education" quickly became almost a household phrase there was virtually no acknowledgement in its meteoric literature of its philosophic and operational linkages with nongradedness. Its advocates seemed enamored of a newly-discovered wheel. Though it should be acknowledged that these enthusiasts were idealistic, articulate and energetic educators, it is sad that as their bandwagon slowed down hardly any of them joined forces and strategies with the veteran protagonists of the kindred cause that was nongradedness. Lost, therefore, was a needed infusion of fresh new ideas and energy. Along with the persisting influence of IGE, however, and as the teacher empowerment/restructuring movements gained momentum, interest in nongradedness was kept alive.

Spanish anarchist Francisco Ferrer (executed in 1901 on charges of fomenting revolt) established a Modern Schools movement emphasizing children's freedom to develop their own potential at their own pace. This movement spread briefly to Russia and also to England and America in the 1920s through the 1950s. A recent account (New York Times, Campus Life Section, December 1, 1991) indicates that the Ferrer Schools rejected everything that schools of its time were: traditional classrooms, authoritarian structure, emphasis on rote learning, examinations, discipline and corporal punishment. Instead, the Modern Schools "established mixed-age classes that encouraged children to learn by doing and in which they were taught practical skills and crafts along with more scholarly subjects.

Reportedly there were such schools in Stelton, New Jersey; Lakewood, New York; and Mohegan Lake, New York. One of the Stelton school's former teachers, in a 1992 interview, stated that the school was referred to as "the anarchists' school," because it resembled a commune or kibbutz in which families lived and worked together; the roads were dirt and the classrooms dusty and without books."(NY Times). While the Ferrer Schools may not have been literally in the same tradition as others mentioned in this paper, there are obviously some shared elements, both philosophical and procedural.

A speculative "aside": This information, makes me (Anderson) wonder whether there might, all along, have been something kindred in the Israeli kibbutz-centered school movement? This will be an interesting question to explore.

More Recent American Experience

Addressing now the recent history of vertical school organization, we see a progressive deterioration (which in this sentence is intended as a positive word) of the literally graded structure in the period following World War II. Beginning in the mid-1940s, American public education has been in an almost continuous state of disequilibrium. Noted earlier above were examples of various experiments with alternative arrangements (such as Gary, Winnetka and Dalton) and with nongradedness itself as in Wisconsin in the early 1940s. With the war ended and a baby boom about to start, an atmosphere favorable to educational changes developed.

It may help the reader to know that this author was born and raised in Milwaukee, where by happenstance his God-daughter was enrolled at age 6 in one of the first two Milwaukee schools to adopt the new Ungraded Primary Program. Predispositions thus nurtured led him after the War to accept an invitation to become (the first) Superintendent of Schools in a brand-new school district (#163 in Park Forest, Illinois) whose venturesome Board of Education wanted their district to achieve a distinctive reputation by officially adopting a district-wide nongraded primary program including abandonment of competitive ABCDEF marking. Between 1949 and 1954 that program became a reality.

In that same period of time, other nongraded programs appeared across the country and a periodical literature began to emerge. With Goodlad, whose doctoral dissertation and subsequent research focused on promotion/retention questions, Anderson then produced the 1959 volume, THE NONGRADED ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, which was updated (to add emphasis to teaming and multiaging for reasons provided in the following section) in 1963 and again revised in 1987.

Facilitating Structures

While the idea of nongradedness was gaining in favor, two related and facilitative ideas appeared on the scene. The first, heterogeneous multi-aged grouping, was not a new concept by any means; but as of the late 1950s it had not been associated with either graded schools (attuned as they were to single-age-group plans) or the early nongraded programs in the U.S.A. For example, the Park Forest program, unfortunately as it seems in retrospect, had been geared to serving children in each class of approximately the same age. But when two researchers from California (Rehwoldt and Hamilton, 1957) reported the significant academic progress made by all ages of children in the innovative Torrance Plan, involving children in interage/intergrade classes, a major weakness in prior American conceptualizations of nongradedness became apparent. As more information became available about Jenaplan and British Primary schools, with their multi-age dimensions, this weakness was further confirmed.

The second major discovery had to do with the flexibility of team teaching, as contrasted with the constraints of the self-contained classroom, as a correlate mechanism with nongrading. Although as noted earlier the Dewey School used a version of teacher teaming, and although other antecedents can be traced (see

Shaplin and Olds 1964), it was the program launched in the Franklin School in Lexington, Massachusetts in 1957 that led to a virtual revolution across the country and even the world. Extensions to the English-speaking world (Canada, Australia/New Zealand, and The United Kingdom see Freeman 1969) came first, and the Shaplin and Olds volume appeared in a Japanese translation in the later 1960s.

The almost-immediate impact of pilot team-teaching efforts upon school architecture, while it led to some excesses and often provided openness and flexibility even before teachers had been prepared to take advantage of it, made a significant contribution to the development of more authentic nongraded programs.

In summary of the above, nongradedness proved to be more attainable when teachers were organized into teams (or equivalent working units) and when children of two or more age groups were combined (family grouping). This conclusion was recognized in practice when Individually Guided Education (IGE), probably the most successful national effort to develop an "ideal" organizational framework, was developed in the 1960s and early 1970s.

Problems of Implementation

It may be an oversimplification to suggest that the persistence of self-containment in American schools is at the root of resistance to reforms such as nongradedness. It does seem clear, however, that in situations where teaming, along with multi-age pupil grouping, has been adopted, nongradedness is much likelier to prove implementable. Recent analysis has amply demonstrated that the tradition of teacher isolation is a major barrier to educational progress and reform (Rosenholtz, 1989; Fullan 1991). There are, however, a number of other explanations for slow progress.

Shaplin (1964) has observed that the many changes that took place in American education following World War II, as well as their antecedents earlier in the century, were all aimed at improving the quality of instruction even though their foci and/or emphases varied. That there was much overlap in their elements, and both multiplication and diversification of the efforts involved, led to an uncoordinated national approach to school improvement. Notably, the projects focusing on curriculum goals and the projects focusing on procedural/organizational goals tended to ignore each other rather than to learn from and become connected with each other. Although he did not say so, Shaplin might well have added that not only the endemic conservatism of American educators but also the ignorance of history and the self-aggrandizing tendencies of many "innovators" have hindered the overall cause of reform.

One of the most powerful inhibitors of latter-day school reforms, especially those that seek to respond more flexibly to individual pupil differences, has been continuing stranglehold that textbooks seem to have on teachers. Graded textbook series, exemplified in the last century by The McGuffey Readers, probably had a powerful and positive influence upon school programs in the days when teachers were woefully ill-educated and ill-prepared, and when research information about how children develop and learn was extremely limited. As more insights into human motivation and capacity for learning became available,

however, it proved difficult for teachers to shed their dependence upon textbook materials and the teachers' guides that accompanied them. Related to this problem was the tendency of teachers to "lock themselves in", both procedurally and psychologically, to a particular grade level, so that suggestions calling for working within a different or broader age range came to be just as unattractive as using a broader range of textbook/curriculum materials. Therefore when required for a time to function in a nongraded, multi-aged program, many teachers welcomed the chance to retreat into their favorite grade level after the new program began to lose momentum.

Shaplin and others have also noted two other phenomena that hinder the progress of worthy new ideas: (l) leadership in American schools comes and goes with distressing rapidity; and (2) rarely if ever are new programs accompanied by sufficient training and support. Re the former, very few of the "new" ideas in this paper survived the departure, often to bigger and better jobs, of their initiators and sponsors. Superintendents, in particular, have short tenures; and their replacements tend to want to put their own unique stamps on their organizations. Principals also come and go, and often the more imaginative ones are hired away because of the unique programs they have developed and the unique skills they acquired in the process.

Turnover within the teaching staff is also a factor in the disappearance or major dilution of an innovative plan, not only because key personnel are gone but because their replacements have not had whatever special training/orientation may have been provided at the outset of the plan.

This brings us to what probably has been the single greatest obstacle to successful and enduring reform: the non-existence of a true profession of teaching. No other so-called profession tolerates such (quantitative, at least) inadequate pre-service preparation, and none is as addicted to the practice of working in isolation. In no other service vocation does the general public (out of which future teachers are drawn) have such a static, conservative mindset about how the service should be provided. Few educated adults in the national workforce function under such constricting working conditions as do teachers even in wealthy communities. All too few, and too limited, are the opportunities provided to inservice teachers for updating and expanding their skills. Add to these the range of unfamiliar and disturbing problems that the typical American teacher faces in today's schools, and we see that survival is itself a major achievement and venturing into challenging new projects, such as nongradedness and teaming, is often seen as unmanageable.

Only rarely, too, is the new project supported by excellent guidebooks and other resources, such as those now being developed to support the recently-mandated nongraded efforts in British Columbia. Almost always, the entire burden of developing new curriculum materials and new ways of organizing the daily program falls on the shoulders of an already-overloaded staff. That some projects manage to succeed even under such difficult conditions is something of a miracle.

CONCLUSION

Presumably other papers in this Symposium will deal with the recent events in Kentucky, British Columbia and elsewhere which have brought nongradedness into a more prominent, and hopefully more promising, position than ever before (at least in the past hundred years). It is exciting to realize that there has been such an active interchange of ideas and practices between Europe and The United States, and reassuring to note that the currency of nongradedness is worldwide in its scope. It is also important to note that in the long history of what might well be termed as a battle for protecting the well-being and the academic progress of young children, there were giants at work on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. To them, this paper is dedicated.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Nongradedness: (a) on the antonym side: the absence of identifying organizational labels, such as FIRST GRADE, Fourth Grade; rejection of the promotion-retention system for administrative control over pupil progress; avoidance of competitive/comparative evaluation systems.

(b) stated positively: acceptance of and respect for individual differences; viewing, and serving, students in terms of holistic development; use of flexible pupil grouping practices; "individualized" instruction; emphasis on learning outcomes rather than coverage of content; emphasis on the understanding of major concepts and methods of inquiry, holistic assessment practices; continuous, comprehensive, and diagnostic; effort to cause children to be continuously successful learners; providing maximum opportunities for children to interact with the full range of other children, and with adults.

Multi-age Grouping: Deliberately assembling together pupils ~~for a~~ of at least two or three chronological age groups comprising a diversified, heterogeneous "mix." Avoiding the practice of restricting pupil-pupil interactions to a single age group.

Family grouping: the terms used in Britain for multi-aged, heterogeneous pupil grouping

Team Teaching: As contrasted with the self-contained classroom teacher arrangement, with each teacher essentially a professional isolate, teaming calls for groups of teachers (ordinarily, 3 to 6 in number) to share the responsibility for working with an aggregate of pupils (ordinarily, between 50 and 150 or so).

Individually Guided Education (IGE). An approach developed more-or-less in parallel, by the /I/D/E/A/ branch of the Kettering Foundation in Ohio and faculty of the University of Wisconsin in Madison. Structural elements combined nongradedness, multi-aged grouping and teaming. Curriculum approaches were very child-centered and free of graded constraints.

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The Graded School.

A GRADED

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1867.

LESSONS OF OBEDIENCE.

Society is so constituted, that the influence of government must everywhere be felt. A cheerful and hearty submission to rightful authority, is perfectly consistent with the freest and fullest development of a manly, independent spirit. It is impossible for any nation to maintain an existence, if the people have not learned this first great lesson of life; least of all can a free republic like ours continue, if the people have learned to govern, but not to obey. It becomes, then, an important inquiry, when and where shall this lesson of obedience be acquired. If delayed to adult years, there is no reason to expect it will ever be learned. It must be in the period of childhood and youth, and it must be either in the family or in the school. But it is painfully manifest, that a large portion of the children of every community, never learn to yield to authority at home, unless it be against their wills. In the public schools, all must be brought to the same standard. A spirit of implicit obedience must be secured, before any thing else can be attempted; not stolid, unreasoning, servile obedience, which crushes all manliness and self-respect out of the soul, but that intelligent, kindly obedience, which recognizes the true relation between parent and

child, teacher and pupil, and bows cheerfully and from choice to the decision of another, whose character and position render it incumbent upon him to direct.

Here it is, in the public schools, that all the pupils learn a lesson which many of them would never learn elsewhere; a lesson which is essential to the perpetuity of our free government. This, if I mistake not, is the most important bond of connection between the free-school system and the State, and in this alone is found a sufficient argument for the support of schools at the expense of the State.*

* "Of all the dangers which threaten the future of our country, none, not even the fetid tide of official corruption, is so fearful as the gradual decrease in our habits of obedience. This is a result of the 'inalienable right of liberty' which we enjoy so fully; and is shown in the impaired force of parental influence, a greater disregard of the rights and comforts of others, and an increasing tendency to evade or defy the authority of law. Young America is now exuberant in its independence; but the greatest blessing it can have, is to be saved from itself, and to be taught that liberty rising above law, destroys its victim; untempered by humanity, is mere selfishness; and unregulated by law, becomes anarchy. This discipline is the work of education, and can only be accomplished by its broadest and most thorough operation."—*Report of Andrew H. Green, President of New York Board of Education*, 1857.

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